



### **#StartHere PODCAST: Episode 18 with Lisa Groeneveld of Logic Supply**

**Lisa:** Biggest thing that goes into starting a business is recognizing opportunity, legitimate opportunity, and saying, "I have a chance right now." The timing is right. The financials are right. The technology is right.

**Sam:** From Vermont Center for Emerging Technologies, it's Start Here, a podcast sharing the stories of active, aspiring, and accidental entrepreneurs. Lisa Groeneveld joins us today who along with her husband Roland founded Logic Supply, hands down one of Vermont's most promising and forward thinking companies. Welcome. This is Sam Roach-Gerber.

**Dave:** And Dave Bradbury.

**Sam:** Recording from the FairPoint Technology Hub in Downtown Burlington, Vermont. Hi, Lisa.

**Lisa:** Hi, Sam.

**Dave:** Welcome, Lisa.

**Lisa:** Thank you, Dave.

**Sam:** We are so psyched to have you. First of all back in the states and actually in our recording studio.

**Dave:** Well, that's kind of a stretch saying it's a recording video, Sam.

Sam: Well, they don't know that. Super impressive.

Dave: Well, they do now.

Lisa: Seems like it to me.

Dave: They do now. Yeah, okay. No more secrets here.

Sam: No more secrets.

Dave: We're about transparency.

Sam: All right, Lisa. Let's just jump in. What is Logic Supply? Tell us about your product.

Lisa: Logic Supply is a company that designs, develops, and manufactures industrial and embedded computers, which is a whole lot of words basically to say that our computers are super rugged and they're used in embedded applications. An embedded application is, for example at JFK Airport, our computers are in the ring of monitors above terminal four. Our computers go into places where people hope that they could just put the computer in there and they don't have to ever go get it down. That's our goal, is computers that don't break down.

Sam: Awesome. That's a lot of sort of nitty-gritty sort of dirty hard jobs that-

Lisa: Absolutely.

Sam: Awesome.

Lisa: Absolutely. We have a customer that is a producer of potato chips. Yeah, and I love food, so I always remember this particular customer. They called us one day and they said, "When we put barbecue powder on our potato chips, the barbecue powder gets into our computers and it kind of forms-"

Dave: Of course it does.

Lisa: "... an electric static adherence to the-"

Sam: What?

Lisa: "... computer and our computers are breaking down all the time." So they wanted a computer with no moving parts, which the majority of our rugged computers are completely solid state. If a computer is solid state, it doesn't suck in air, and it doesn't blow out air, so that's really great in environments with a lot of particulate materials like barbecue powder.

Sam: Who knew?

Lisa: Who knew?

Dave: Is it combustible barbecue powder or is it just ...? I mean I'm having my kids have this stuff all time. I don't-

Lisa: If it's sticking to the inside of a computer, you wonder what it's doing to your stomach-

Dave: Yeah, all right. Let's not-

Lisa: ... But I don't want to ruin your summer barbecues, so let's move along.

Dave: I think that's great. Did you know you always wanted to be in business for yourself or with your husband? I mean how did you ... Was this a conscious thing, an accidental thing, or how did it come about?

Lisa: Roland and I share in common entrepreneurial parents. Roland's family has a business, or they sold it, but they had a business in the Netherlands called the Groeneveld Group. My mom and dad had a store in Montpellier called the Cobbler Shop. I can't honestly say that I ever wanted to be an entrepreneur and really Roland probably either because we saw all of the stress associated with owning your own business, the risk involved, the responsibility you feel for a lot of other families. I think we both for a long time just thought, "Wouldn't it be better to work for other people and not have that stress and strain?" But then my father passed away. We were living in the Netherlands and I decided to move back to be closer to my mom and brothers, and Roland came with me, which was wonderful because he had never been more than an hour away from his parents, so it was a big step for him. He got here and he said, "Lisa, I just don't want to start over again, you know? Do you think we can start a business?"

Sam: Cool.

Lisa: I had to spend some time really, yeah, getting that idea into my head emotionally because I saw how hard it was for my parents, but I think it was the right choice for us.

Dave: What were the first steps that you took after you decided, "Okay, we're gonna do this."? Did you already know what sort of business you were going to do? I mean it was either cobbler, which is probably a shoe store, or clearly rugged computers?

Lisa: Yeah, right and it seems so start now in those terms. Roland and I were living in the Boston area at the time, and we looked at each other, and we thought, "What do we love?" Because you'll be more successful with what you love I believe and the first thing popped into our head was coffee. We love coffee. We were probably talking 8:00 in the morning and probably hadn't had a cup of coffee yet, but it became very clear very quickly that Roland and I should do something in IT because I had been, my entire career to that point had been in IT. His entire career to that point had been in IT, and he was more of a technologist, and I was a salesperson, and so in that respect we covered at least a couple really important aspects of starting a business. We knew the product and the technology, Roland did really well, and I knew sales and marketing really well, and it became clear after about the first six months that the business was going to be profitable. At that point, we were like, "My god, we just have to go all in."

Sam: Only six months?

Lisa: Six months.

Sam: Wow.

Lisa: But let me point out one thing to your listeners. There's a lot that goes into starting a business, but the biggest thing that goes into starting a business is recognizing opportunity, legitimate opportunity, and saying, "I have a chance right now." The timing is right. The financials are right. The technology is right to explore an idea. Sometimes those elements don't come together, starting a business is more difficult, so for us what really came together, Roland found a technology, a mini-ITX motherboard. I wish your listeners could hear me, but this is a motherboard, you know. I can't-

Dave: We have a very sophisticated listener base, so ...

Lisa: Two hands put together. They can imagine it.

Sam: Like three iPhones maybe?

Lisa: Yeah, like three iPhones next to each other. He found that technology, and it was only available in Asia, and he said, "We should import this to the United States." Businesses were starting to realize that the internet was a safe place to use their credit cards, so they were starting to purchase online, and Google was coming out with Google AdWords. So we were in the right place with the right technology idea at the right time and that was about 2003. So when we decided to start the business, that all kind of came together.

Dave: Were you still working elsewhere when you started this?

Lisa: Yeah.

Dave: How did that transition go? Because sometimes it's a cold cutover or a painful work in two jobs for full time for a bit.

Lisa: We needed to fund the business. I don't mean anything against venture capital, but going out and trying to find capital for our business was not what we thought was gonna work for our business. The primary reason being that hardware, in the world of IT, hardware's just not that sexy, so we didn't think we'd find-

Dave: It's sexy here at VCET. We're all about hardware, software.

Lisa: I'm glad you guys thinks it's sexy. We do everything we can to make it sexy.

Dave: Zapwater, we do it all.

Lisa: [inaudible 00:08:00] So we had to finance it ourselves and it all came out of our bank accounts. I was working at a company called Fiberlink in Massachusetts and Roland was getting the business off the ground, so I was buying the groceries. One of us had to pay the rent, but really, yeah it took about six months.

Sam: How did you find your customers, those first ones?

Lisa: They found us. That goes back to-

Dave: Google AdWords?

Sam: The AdWords.

Lisa: ... everything really sort of coming together, yeah. Prior to that, our competition and also companies I had worked for like WorldCom, and CompuServe, and UUNET, salespeople were in the field. They were feet on the street and suddenly around 1999 when Google came out, I think it was '99 or '98, people started doing their own research. Once they realized that their credit cards were secure online, they came and they found us, and no one was more surprised than Roland and I. We'd go out for breakfast on Saturday morning, and come home, and there'd be three orders.

Dave: Isn't that the coolest feeling, like when the little chime goes in those early days?

Lisa: Yeah.

Dave: It's like validation.

Lisa: Unreal, Dave. Yup.

Dave: Rent you can pay. It's really cool.

Lisa: I remember saying to my mom, "I wish dad were still alive to see that business happens, but you're not in the store," because my father was in the store all the time.

Sam: At what point did the scale tip, and you guys knew that you had to kind of scale it from there, and grow out of your apartment or your house?

Lisa: It was when Roland and our friend dropped the air conditioner out of the window on the second story. I was like, "You know what?"

Dave: It's usually a public safety hazard.

Lisa: "This is just not working." Yeah. I came home, and they were standing at the window with their eyes wide, and their hands up in the air, and I'm like, "What

just happened?" They were like, "We just dropped the air conditioner out of the window." The problem was the boxes had boxed in the window so much that they couldn't really maneuver around the air conditioner. It was at that point we were like, "You know what? This is just not working."

Dave: Time to grow up, right?

Lisa: Yeah. There were 18 wheelers in our little neighborhood in Massachusetts and I would like to say something. When we were in Massachusetts, we had the decision to stay in Massachusetts. I love Massachusetts. I called Vermont. I called a fellow whose first name is Richard and he worked for the state and I said, "I'm thinking of moving to Vermont." That was 2004 and Roland was fairly ambivalent. He said, "I'll stay in Massachusetts or I'll move to Vermont. Whatever you think is best."

Sam: He's already across the Atlantic, so-

Lisa: Right. His mom and dad are still over in the Netherlands, so I called the state of Vermont and they went out of their way to help us move up here.

Dave: Cool. Was that Rich Smith maybe at Iconic Development?

Lisa: For Washington County, yeah.

Dave: For Washington-

Lisa: I can't remember his last name, but I think he's retired now, but I owe him a debt of gratitude, you know? For getting us up here.

Sam: That's a good one for our listeners to hear. That's awesome. We're Massachusetts fans as well.

Lisa: I love Massachusetts.

Sam: But-

Dave: Yeah, I'm a recovering Masshole from way back.

Sam: Samesies. Western Mass though doesn't really count according to Dave, so ...

Dave: Yeah, well I just thought-

Lisa: I went to Northeastern, so ...

Dave: I just thought it was Boston, Wusta, Westa, Wusta and that was it. That was it.

Lisa: Or Fall River.

Sam: Sigh, yes. Lisa, we talk about here and there that's necessary to grow Vermont businesses today. You guys have offices across the globe, so Logic Supply's a great example of that. Why is it important for Logic Supply to be a global company?

Lisa: If every company doesn't, it really should ask itself what its customers need. In Logic Supply, we define our customers as our employees and our team. They're customers. Our customers are the companies that buy our products and services from us. To a certain extent, our customer base is our community too. Those three factors really determine where your organization needs to do business. We need to be where the resources are. We need to be where our customers need us to be and we need to recognize that it's a global economy. I am a big fan of well defined and negotiating trading partnerships. I am a fan of a open internet. I am not a fan of the fooling around with net neutrality.

Dave: Yeah, that kind of sucks.

Lisa: Yeah. Just to kind of put my two cents in there. This openness, openness of borders, the ability for people to travel, the ability for people to interact with each other internationally, the ability to have open communication on the internet. It all ties in so tightly with how Logic Supply has been successful, has seen the world. It ties in with our core values, which are open, fair, innovative, and independent, and we go where we're needed. We go where our customers are. We go where our employees want to be. That means for us innovating and growing in Asia where really the heart of the hardware world really is. Growing in Europe where there is a vibrant business community, and a lot of need for our products and services, and of course growing in the United States, South America, North America.

Dave: Your culture is well known around here at least from the outside until you experience it, but uniquely I think you publish employee salaries and other data. How did that come about and how does it work or doesn't work?

Lisa: I'm sure Roland and I would love to take credit for our open salary policy, which has been in my opinion wildly successful, but actually Roland worked for a very large Anglo-Dutch consultancy company called CMG. They published the salaries, or had an open salary policy, for well over 20,000 employees.

Sam: Wow.

Lisa: Yes.

Sam: That's crazy.

Lisa: I get asked questions, "Does it scale? Does it work?" I always say, "Well, it worked for CMG and if it worked for them, it should work for Logic Supply." Our open salary policy, we don't publish it publicly, but we publish it within the company and it is in line with our open core value, and the core value of fair. It's important for us to say about fair, fair doesn't necessarily mean that people like it. It means that they get to know about it, and they get to openly disagree, and they get to share their opinions without undue retribution. Having an open salary policy often eliminates a lot of questions and conversations. Oddly enough when something is open and transparent, most people assume that it's copacetic, it's cool, because you're not hiding it, so it must be okay. We really don't get a lot of questions and when we do, it gives us an opportunity to say, "All right. Either you're right. You are not paid the way you should be and we're gonna fix that for you." Or it gives us the opportunity to say, "Okay, well here's why these colleagues are making more money than you and here's how they're performing. That's your bar. That's your standard." Most people respond to that really. Well.

Sam: Would you say that that's a policy, like that kind of self-selects a certain type of employee?

Lisa: Wow, that's a great question, Sam. I have never asked it that way. I think in the past, I've had people say to me, "When a person comes in, will they perform once they know their salary is open?" My experience has been yes and here I'm looking at my colleague, [Derrick 00:16:10], who's lived in this sort of environment. Mostly when we explain it to people during interviews, people are intrigued and they're excited about it. I think I don't know that we've ever lost a great candidate because of it perse, but I also have to say that if they did

not agree with it, they probably did self-select their way out of it without really saying they disagree. Yeah. That's a good question. It's hard to really say, but I will say as far as I know, all of the team at Logic Supply is, if not happy with it, they kind of take it a little bit for granted, and it's not super common. An open salary policy is difficult if a company or organization has been in business for a really long time and has not practiced salary integrity over the years. It was easier for us because we decided to do it from the get-go.

Sam: That's not an anomaly. You guys, your whole culture is about openness and so it kind of goes with the flow in terms of your other policies.

Lisa: Yeah, and open and fair work together. They are a balance of each other, so not everything is open, you know? There is definitely confidential employee information. When people are hitting on hard times, that's confidential and that's where fair comes in. So open and fair, independent and innovative as core values, they don't tell us how to behave. They give us a vocabulary around which we can discuss our behavior, so we don't always know what to do. We're not always on our A game, but when we're not, we have a way to talk about it as a group and as a group kind of bring ourselves back to where we think we need to be. Doesn't mean we always make good choices, but I do want to make that distinction. Not everything is open. There is quite a lot of stuff that's confidential because it's fair for it to be confidential.

Sam: Awesome.

Dave: How many? We never really asked, like how many people do you have? How sort of large is the company?

Sam: Great question, Dave.

Dave: Are you on every continent? Is that your question, Sam?

Sam: No, I ... We should know that though.

Dave: I mean because we left off, we know there's at least three of you. You, Roland, and Derrick over here in the corner.

Lisa: Yes, me, Roland, and Derrick. Hopefully Derrick is texting the HR team, find out how many there are. Let's say maybe 100 or so, 120.

Derrick: It's like 130 worldwide.

Lisa: 130 worldwide. Thanks, Derrick.

Dave: Wow.

Lisa: Yeah [crosstalk 00:18:29]

Dave: Did you ever anticipate being responsible and enabling that many people?

Lisa: I am highly paranoid every day I think I'm gonna go out of business, you know? Funny enough. No, I never. I never did. I have come to a place. This is my personal opinion. I have come to a place where I really think Logic Supply is going to thrive, and continue to grow, and it all comes down to the team, you know? We have, and I know everyone would say this about their company, but we have an astounding team, and they are pushing the company forward, and they are fearless, so I have more confidence now than ever. I sleep like a baby. Five and ten years ago, I was waking up at 3:00 in the morning, and I called it the witching hour, obsessing, and stressing, and writing to-do lists, but I am cool, calm, and collected now. It's all blue sky I think for Logic Supply and it really comes back to the entire team.

Dave: This is kind of inspiring, Sam. I don't-

Sam: I know.

Dave: I'm like a little bit ill prepared for that emotion. Sorry. Awesome.

Sam: Well, I-

Lisa: I made Dave cry.

Sam: Yeah, that does not happen often.

Dave: Yes. I'm weeping.

Sam: I think fresh powder's the only thing really I've seen that really brings him to tears.

Dave: Fresh powder you can't get to makes me cry. Yes.

Sam: Yeah, yeah. I mean that just, to me from the outside, I think most people view Logic Supply as a company that knows exactly who they are and where they're going, which isn't always the case, so that's just super cool from an outsider's perspective. But I'm just kind of curious, going from this husband-wife team to 130 employees globally, was it always that kind of clear and did you always know exactly who you are?

Lisa: No. Our employees have pushed us in wonderful ways mostly because they have fearlessly held us accountable. I would say in about 2009 or 2010, a lot of people on the team were just coming to Roland and I, and saying, "We don't see the vision. This place is a train wreck. It's a dumpster fire. We don't know what direction we're going in. We don't know who we are. Why are we here?" Roland and I thought, "Really? They can't read our mind? God, what's wrong with them? Like isn't it obvious just by the fact I'm standing here and breathing?" It was at that moment that Roland and I looked at each other, and we said, "There has to be a way to help the team understand what we're trying to accomplish because it seems so obvious to us." We met with a peer group, Vistage CEO Group, and this is where I want your listeners-

Dave: With Heather Anderson?

Lisa: Heather Anderson.

Dave: Love her. She's a friend from [crosstalk 00:21:27]

Lisa: I love her. Yes. I want your listeners to really stop and think about the power of many minds coming together to help them solve their business problems. We went to Vistage. We started talking to other CEOs who had similar challenges. We were gratified to know we weren't alone. One of the other Vistage members, Ben Anderson-Ray of Trinitas Advisors who is awesome, he came to me and said, "Lisa, I understand your struggle and if you let me spend about an hour with you, I think I can give you our framework."

Sam: Yes, please.

Lisa: He goes, "This is just a tactical issue, and it seems so existential." He sat us down, and he talked to us about a one page operating strategy that he and his consulting partners had put together, and we have been using that one page

operating strategy, which we call in Logic Supply Project 220. We kicked it off in 2010, and it culminates in the year 2020 where hopefully Logic Supply becomes a \$100 million company. What that one page operating strategy has done it has said to the entire team, "Here's who we are and here's what's important to us. Here are our strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, a standard SWAT. Here are our three year thrusts, our year initiatives, and our 90 days rocks." A 90 day rock is the thing you have to get done in the next 90 days. When you give that kind of information to smart people like Derrick, they have no question about what their to-do list looks like.

They do not come up to you and say, "I don't get it. There's no clarity here. We don't have a strategy." They simply go, and they look at their one page operating strategy, and they ask clarifying questions, and they make great decisions every single day because that's what they are. They are business people. You give them the keys to understand the business. You get a little bit out of their way. You give them some constraints within which to work and they go gangbusters. When you have 130 people pulling on the oars at the same time, you move fast. I would say that that one page operating strategy, Vistage, Ben, has been an engine to Logic Supply's growth. It's not rocket science. It is simply a single piece of paper that respects everybody's business acumen and that's all it is.

Sam: That's awesome. It sounds like you chose the right place to call home. Vermont's really had an impact on your business. From when you called them, they said, "Yes, come here."

Lisa: Yeah, they did.

Sam: To the folks that you just mentioned. Are there are any other sort of resources in Vermont that have really helped you guys to scale?

Lisa: Absolutely. God, and I hope I don't forget anybody important. Pretty much the entire state of Vermont. Vermont gets a little bit of a bad rap. We got high taxes, and difficult regulations, and I don't know. Maybe it's because I'm so liberal, taxes and regulations don't tend to perturb me too much. Someone's gotta pave the roads. The state of Vermont has always been supportive. Administrations, it hasn't really mattered whether they were a Democratic administration or a Republican administration. They've been supportive.

They've reached out to us. Vermont is a nice small state. You can reach your congressional delegation. They care. The governor cares. The governor has always cared and it's been multiple governors since we've been there.

Dave: Yeah, isn't that? That is so special in Vermont. I mean-

Lisa: It is special in Vermont and-

Dave: [inaudible 00:25:08] Senator Leahy calls incubator and coworking members here, which blows me away.

Lisa: Yeah, absolutely. Yup.

Dave: They care and they help.

Lisa: I got called and they, you know.

Dave: Congressman Welch, I mean right down the line.

Lisa: Yup. Business Advisory Council that Congressman Welch has is super handy. I think it's because, and my family's been in Vermont for quite a few generations now, Vermont is a ... We're a rural state, and we're kind of pioneers, and we're a little do-it-ourselves. A lot of Vermonters, when something breaks in their house, they fix it themselves. You don't necessarily have the ability to always rely on the people around you. Though we are good with our neighbors, our neighbors are often three and four miles away from us, right? So we're good at taking care of ourselves up here.

Dave: I think we have to be nicer. I always joke that at some point you're gonna push one another out of a snowbank.

Lisa: Yes, right? Be nice to your neighbor.

Dave: Right? You really can't afford to be the real jerk out there or even if you are, you sort of just know you're gonna have to help somebody out-

Lisa: Yeah, you gotta help each other.

Dave: ... which is really great.

Sam: I think-

Lisa: We're a little state. We don't have a ton of human resources to fall back on. We have to make our labor force work and our labor force works really hard. They just need the investment.

Dave: I think you view successfully the VEGI, the Vermont Growth Incentives-

Lisa: Oh, yes. I-

Dave: ... the Vermont training program, which is-

Lisa: I wrap that all in when I say, "Call the state of Vermont." Think Vermont.gov, if you're coming to Vermont, is a great place to start. Everyone I've ever worked with has been falling over themselves to help us be successful and to tell us about the resources out there. Vermont Training Grant, VITA, VEGI. Yup, the alphabet soup.

Sam: You just have to remember to ask for help, which I think a lot of Vermont entrepreneurs kind of forget to do.

Dave: Yeah and I mean you didn't say this, but it's isolating and can be lonely as an entrepreneur, and granted you had Roland, and husband, wife, and kitchen table sort of discussions, but more and more using folks like Heather Anderson's group or they join a facility where they can just realize there are other people doing amazing things.

Lisa: Yeah and not to flatter you guys because you're standing right here, but this entire VCET facility where you see people working together, when someone says something out loud and you hear it two cubes down, you know you're not alone. No one faces a business challenge that has not already been faced to how old is commerce? I mean no one faces a business challenge that's not already been faced, and remaining humble enough to know that you don't have to always reinvent the wheel, and you can rely on the people around you. You will accelerate your business growth dramatically if you don't get too caught up in the idea that you're the only one who can run your business.

Dave: Yeah. No, I would agree. When we got to about 40 different members in this facility here at FairPoint, the group started really helping one another. The snowball achieved critical momentum and it's just continued to build. You

should definitely come to one of our first Fridays. Every first Friday, 4:00-ish, 4:30, there's some drinks in the fridge and people just gather-

Lisa: Nice.

Dave: ... and sort of share a win or some other story, and a way to meet people. It's kind of cool.

Lisa: Oh, that sounds like fun.

Dave: But we do have to talk about the F word, okay?

Lisa: Fudge.

Dave: This is failure.

Lisa: Oh, failure. I was thinking of food of course.

Dave: We can talk fudge if you'd like. Penuche is one of my favs, but let's talk about failure, okay?

Lisa: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Dave: Because the rear view mirror, we sort of forget a lot of the fetal position moments or why are we doing this? You alluded to the 3:00 AM sort of stress. What's an example of a failure or a real moment in time that was presented to the company and what got you through it?

Lisa: Oh my god, we've had so many failures. Derrick, where do I start? Do you have a favorite? Let me talk about a failure we turned around if that's-

Sam: Love. Inspiring.

Lisa: Thank you. I have a lot that we failed on and didn't turn around. Let this be a little bit of a warning message for your listeners. Logic Supply decided to expand to Europe and we underestimated the importance of expanding with the right partners. We did not do a good job picking the team that we were expanding with and ultimately we did not have a good agreement with them. When it fell apart, basically Roland and I had to go back to Europe to pick up the pieces. That comes down to human resources. We had a great team over

there. The people in the actual positions, our staff, they were fantastic, but they lacked effective leadership and leadership was not integrated into the Logic Supply world. I'm really opening the kimono here. I see Derrick looking at me with wide eyes. It was a difficult moment for Roland and I where maybe we were getting cocky, and we thought, "Oh, everybody would run the business similar to us," but that's not necessarily the case.

Every corporation has a culture and culture is carried forward by actually the feet on the street, in this case, the employees, the team, and it's not just a simple cut and paste. Culture beats everything every single day when it comes to your success and we did not really do a good job there. Now that team is performing much better and the early results here out of Europe are great. They're growing now. There's a ton of opportunity over there. They're committed and I think they're having fun, which is really important because people won't stick with a company that really just feels like it's beating them over the head all the time. It's really important for the team to enjoy themselves. 40 hours a week is a long time to spend suffering, so it's starting to turn itself around.

Dave: That's great. We have a couple companies in our portfolio from our seed fund that are looking at expanding in different countries now. I may need to turn the mics off and come pick your brain as part of my board duty just-

Lisa: Oh, I have ... I'm not even-

Dave: Because part of it's not making mistakes that are obvious, right? Or that others have done and gosh, I think if you can increase the pace of those learnings, and your dollar isn't wasted, or the emotional energy with people that aren't in right positions are not supported because time's ticking.

Lisa: Time's ticking.

Dave: The world is competitive and pretty unforgiving in a business.

Lisa: Yeah. I would be happy to speak to the folks involved in doing that because even if you're opening an office in Rutland, it really doesn't matter how far away.

Dave: Here's the cool thing. These two companies? They all have motherboards.

Lisa: Oh, they have motherboards. Oh, now I'm interested.

Dave: Oh yeah, totally geeked out company. This is it. This is hardware.

Lisa: Hardware, awesome.

Dave: This is hardware.

Sam: I love it. Lisa, have you had a mentor?

Lisa: Wow, if it takes me that long to answer, I guess the answer is no-ish.

Sam: Not formally?

Lisa: Yeah.

Sam: Do you provide mentorship for anyone in particular?

Lisa: Me personally?

Sam: Yeah.

Lisa: Oh, I'm just a bad person. Probably not.

Sam: Sign me up, all right. Meet you next week.

Dave: I was gonna say I wish the world had more bad people like you.

Lisa: Yeah, I-

Sam: You hear that, listeners? She doesn't have a mentee, but maybe could if we play our cards right.

Lisa: Excuse me.

Dave: We could auction it off for our nonprofit fundraiser perhaps.

Lisa: Yeah, you know what? It's funny. Okay. I'm gonna say something. I'm maybe a little bit vulnerable right now. I don't know that I'm qualified.

Sam: Oh my god.

Dave: Stop it.

Lisa: I know. I know. I know. I know, but I'm still just Lisa from Barre in my own mind.

Dave: Lisa from Barre.

Sam: Lisa from Barre, you are mentoring Dave and I as you speak right now.

Dave: Seriously.

Lisa: Okay, now I'm blushing.

Dave: Oh my-

Lisa: I don't want to sound false modest. My hands are a little sweaty right now. I would love to. I think my biggest fear would be steering someone in the wrong direction and to know that, and I know how much I don't know, and I know how much I have to learn. It takes a lot of courage to feel like you can be the kind of person to educate others. If I were a mentor, I hope I would have the presence of mind to ask more questions, and dig for questions with my mentee, and give them an opportunity to answer their own questions. Because that's probably where I would provide the most benefit is just being deeply curious and make sure they're investigating all of their potential because it would be terrible to give a great person bad advice.

Sam: Sometimes all you need is a sounding board, you know?

Lisa: Yeah.

Sam: Someone to ask those questions and kind of make you think a little deeper.

Lisa: Yeah. In running the business, it's now been 15 years and having two kids and stuff, I've been really busy and self-absorbed in that. We have such a great team at Logic Supply that when Roland and I went to Europe to kind of try to set that organization on the rails again, we left the team and we said, "All right. You guys got this, right? See you all later over Google Hangout." The team looked at us and said, "Yep, we got it. Don't worry," and they do. They've really got it and so when I came back to the United States, I looked at the team and I said, "I am not taking anybody's job." So my role at Logic Supply now is really as a co-owner role. It's a board role and I'm there to give the team advice, but the

team is running the company, so I probably have more time to actually think about other people and be a mentor, so-

Dave: You're an in-house mentor it sounds like, right?

Lisa: What's that?

Dave: You're an in-house mentor. That's great, without calling it that, so-

Lisa: Yeah, I can be, but oh, thank you, Derrick. You're nodding your head. But yeah, I'd love to be a mentor now that you've got me thinking about that. All right, auction it off.

Sam: Good to know.

Dave: Auction-

Lisa: What are you gonna do? Raffle off? [crosstalk 00:35:46]

Dave: Well, we've had over the years here at VCET, we probably have 130 or so folks like yourself, or that live up in the hills, or come here back to college reunions that volunteer their time for mentor moments because the right conversation like you alluded to the gentleman from Trinitas-

Lisa: Ben, mm-hmm (affirmative).

Dave: Yeah, just an hour of that time was transformative, and it doesn't have to be a structured program. It doesn't have to be a lifetime commitment. We have found that it absolutely moves the needle, all right? It inspires folks who maybe not confident, or it maybe corrects a bias or a decision and gives them an unfair advantage in life. I think it's one of the coolest things that Taylor, Sam, and I can do here at VCET, so maybe we'll put on the list. Now we know, right? You can't hide overseas anymore.

Lisa: I'm here.

Dave: You're on the board of trustees at Champlain College. We love Champlain College.

Lisa: Yes, well deserved.

Dave: There's probably 15 of them out here working right now, so-

Lisa: Yes, we have a lot of Champlainers that work too.

Dave: Yeah. I'm really curious. Why is it important for colleges and universities to have actual entrepreneurs on their boards? What do you bring to the table?

Lisa: Let me speak specifically about my opinion on Champlain on that point. Champlain is such a pragmatic school. They are not fooling around. They want to educate those kids and they want those kids to get a job if that's what those kids want. The best thing about being on the board with Champlain is that they, everybody on the board is just very level-headed. There's no drama. They're not flying off the handle on anything. They're looking to advise the school on how to educate those kids as best they can and how to help them get a great job upon graduation. Having business people on the board helps an academic institution remember why it exists and it doesn't just exist purely for the economic motives of business, but that is a large part of why kids, or young people go to school. I guess I should technically stop calling them kids. They are adults. Why these young adults go to college. They also go to college because they want to have a mission in life and often you need to fund your life's mission, so there should be a healthy mix of mission driven education to these young people at Champlain, and a reminder something's gotta pay the bills. Something's gotta pay the bills. That's what I really have always appreciated about Champlain.

Also, when I was a high school kid in Barre growing up, I knew what kind of school Champlain was even back then. My brother went to Champlain and they put him on a great path towards getting a bachelor's degree before they offered bachelor's degrees. So I've always sort of felt a warm and fuzzy spot for Champlain, and I was very honored when they asked me to join the board. It was a wonderful experience for a business person from a private company to see how an academic institution runs the complexity, the diligence that they put into doing it right. I've really enjoyed working with Don and the rest of the board. It's been a good experience.

Dave: Great.

Lisa: Yup and I gotta say. One of the things when I talk about Logic Supply growing and I mentioned the state, I should've also mentioned Champlain because very soon after Logic Supply moved up to South Burlington, Champlain College really started reaching out to us saying, "How can our students help you? How can we be more involved?" When I became a trustee, I said to Don, "Hey, anytime you want to bring the faculty to the office, let me know," and he did. I was surprised. He brought like 15 people. They-

Dave: Was it free food? Was it a meal included? It was probably one of your meal days, right? That usually-

Lisa: Yeah, Beer Friday? Yeah, we do have a Beer Friday. No, it wasn't Beer Friday, but I appreciated that those teachers took their time, the professors took their time to come out and see what a local employer was about. We have a lot of Champlain students [crosstalk 00:39:58]

Dave: They seem to be playing to win as well as some others here.

Sam: Speak of universities playing to win, you're my fellow Husky.

Lisa: Husky.

Sam: Woo!

Lisa: Co-op program, ra ra.

Sam: Yeah. As Dave knows, I'm constantly ranting and raving about Northeastern's co-op program. For our listeners who maybe don't know, you alternate six months of classes with six months of internship.

Lisa: Absolutely. Pays the rent.

Sam: It is invaluable and I again just, I can't recommend it highly enough. Can you sort of back me up and speak to the importance of experiential learning and how maybe Vermont schools should consider it?

Lisa: Oh, wow. I can tell you there are Vermont schools doing an excellent job with it. We have a person on our team. His name is Casey and he might be a little embarrassed that I'm mentioning him on the air. He was a student at Essex Tech and they do the Career Work Experience Program, CWE. When Logic Supply was

in Water Barre, and I think Casey was maybe a junior in high school, he came and did his CWE with us, and that's an unpaid period of time at an employer where he sort of shadows someone on the team. Roland and I looked at Casey, and we were like, "That is exactly the type of person we want on our team longterm." He finished his CWE. If memory serves me, he started a part-time job with us during the summer, and somehow his family managed to get him down to Water Barre because he was I think living in the Essex area. We hired him right out of high school and he's been with us ever since.

I am a big fan of people getting a college education, but I also have to say it's not 100% necessary in IT. If you are just really good at what you do, and you have the appropriate corporate behaviors, which Casey does, you can be very very successful. So he has been at Logic Supply eight years probably and he is thriving. It's just exciting to know that there are jobs in Vermont for young people coming out of high school with the right drive and the right experience. Those jobs can help them fund continuing education, whether that's online like the truED program at Champlain, or it's in-person like on the Champlain campus, or it's continuing education, or certificate programs. There's a lot of paths to getting educated and educating the workforce. I will say this about Northeastern. I would not have gotten through college without co-op. I needed those breaks to earn money, to pay the rent, to pay tuition, to go back into school. My first job out of Northeastern was because of a connection I made through a co-op.

Sam: Absolutely. Yeah, and I think it is a great point that you don't necessarily have to do a traditional kind of four year education in order to get that experiential learning.

Lisa: Yes, and I'd like to make a quick point. Schools like Champlain are realizing that. They're realizing that today's technology can facilitate learning, and one thing I really appreciated being on the board was witnessing the innovation and the creativity of the college in trying to figure out creative ways to reach out to students. Their truED program is right up my alley being an IT person. It is a great way to get an education that doesn't require someone to move away from home and live in a dorm room.

Sam: I think of one of my most important things for me too is that you could work a co-op or an internship into your sophomore year, and I had so many people that ended up changing their majors because they realized that what they thought was business wasn't business.

Lisa: It's not what they thought it was gonna be.

Sam: Right, or nursing, or fill in the blank.

Lisa: I think the joke at Northeastern is your co-op teaches you what you don't want to do, so that space is important-

Dave: Process of elimination, right?

Lisa: Absolutely. When I was at Northeastern, I had two international co-ops. I had an international co-op in France at a French telecoms company and an international co-op in the Netherlands at a Dutch telecoms company, so I knew I wanted to be in IT already in college at Northeastern. I had the opportunity to live and work in a foreign language in France. These are opportunities that are hard to get unless you're in a school program-

Sam: That's built into it.

Lisa: ... built into it and baked in where the structure in these foreign countries exists.

Dave: What did you know you didn't want to be?

Lisa: I know I did not want to do cold calling in sales.

Sam: Oh my god, same.

Dave: How about you, Sam? What did you not want to be?

Sam: I didn't want to be a cog in a machine. Yeah.

Lisa: Wow. That's-

Dave: At UVM, I did an internship with a stockbroker and I didn't want to wear socks. You had to wear socks with your suits and stuff [crosstalk 00:44:53]

Lisa: Right, otherwise your feet stink.

Dave: Yeah, it just was a-

Lisa: Just so listeners know, Dave's got no shoes on. [crosstalk 00:44:59]

Dave: No, no. I'm a darn tough guy, right? You're coming up here and taping with us.

Lisa: Actually, he has nice leather shoes on.

Sam: Well, the ironic thing about my two favorite co-ops is one was with a startup and one was with a nonprofit, and now I got to combine the best of both worlds working with startups at a nonprofit.

Lisa: Wow, at a nonprofit.

Sam: There you go.

Dave: Spooky.

Lisa: This is your dream job.

Sam: I know.

Dave: Well, I think we need to wrap this up with magic wand time.

Sam: Dave, I think you deserve it. Go ahead. You've earned it.

Dave: Okay. If you could change one thing in Vermont, magic wand, superpowers, what would you change?

Lisa: This is very self-serving, but I would put Vermont a little more in the middle of the country as an ecommerce company. Yeah, we're kind of physically the end of the line here.

Sam: Can we keep the lake though?

Lisa: Yes.

Sam: Oh, thank god.

Lisa: And the mountains and the snow, so that would be weird next to Kentucky, but sure. I totally would do that. I'd move us down on Interstate 40, just but like this whole little snowy-

Dave: By the river, like by the Mississippi, sort of-

Lisa: Yeah, right where the-

Dave: Is that the middle of the country?

Lisa: I can't remember the highway that runs north-south, but there's the east-west highway and ecommerce companies that do a lot of shipping like Logic Supply does-

Dave: Basically where FedEx is, right? You want to be, like the FedEx depot?

Lisa: Yeah, kind of down there. Actually, I used to be the account manager for FedEx at WorldCom. I lived in Memphis. I know the South very well for that period of time I lived down there.

Dave: Now we are back to barbecue, where we started.

Sam: Oh, well done.

Lisa: Oh yes, we did talk about barbecue. Yeah, potato chips.

Dave: Awesome. Well Lisa, thank you for making time-

Lisa: Yeah, thank you guys.

Dave: ... coming in here this morning.

Sam: This was fun, Lisa.

Lisa: Thank you guys for the mission you're on. It's important to Vermont and we appreciate your dedication.

Sam: Thank you.

Dave: Thank you. This has been Start Here with Sam and Dave, a podcast sharing the stories of active, aspiring, and accidental entrepreneurs. This series has been

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